

Restaurant operator shares customer service lessons with health care employees

BY BRIDGETT HERNANDEZ
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“You are not in the health care business,” Jeff Hoffman said to a roomful of employees at Coventry Meadows Assisted Living. “You are in the people business.”

Hoffman, the operator of Chick-fil-A at Jefferson Pointe, was invited to the assisted living facility on May 16 to share his advice on customer service from 14 years of experience in the restaurant industry.

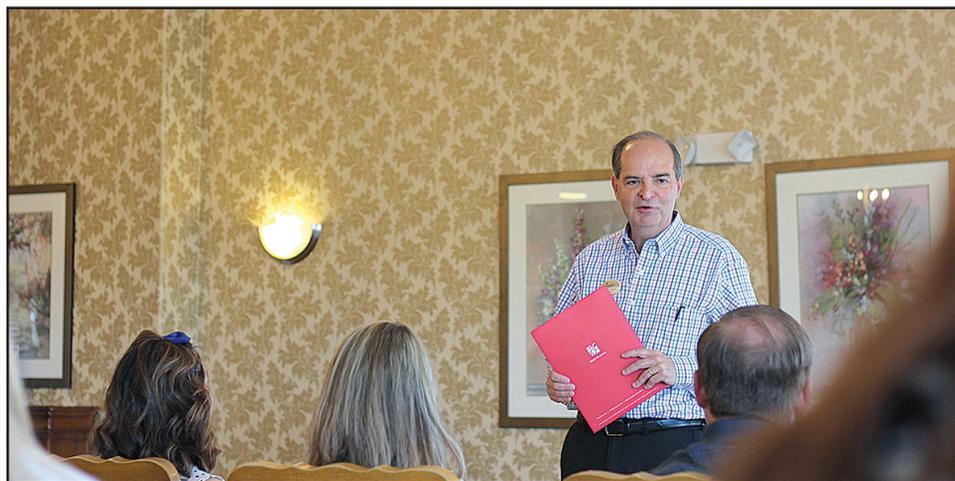
He has given similar presentations for local government agencies, nonprofits, doctors’ offices, dentists’ offices and banks, but this one was a little different. That’s because his mother-in-law is one of the staff’s customers – she moved into Coventry Meadows about six weeks ago.

Lindsey Broyles, general manager of Coventry Meadows, said the management team were thinking of some fun ways that they could promote customer service. They decided to invite Hoffman to come out to talk about how he trains his staff in that area.

Employees enjoyed a catered lunch while they listened to Hoffman’s presentation. It was part of a series of events in May to promote customer service.

Some employees at Coventry Meadows, like those who serve meals to residents, can relate to customer service in the restaurant industry. However, customer service is about more than food – it’s about making people feel like their request is your top priority, Broyles said.

“Whether you’re ordering a chicken sandwich or you need a Band-Aid, it’s still a request, and it’s still customer service to show your customer that you care about what



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Jeff Hoffman, operator of Chick-fil-A at Jefferson Pointe, gives a presentation on customer service to the staff at Coventry Meadows Assisted Living.

they’re requesting and that you’re addressing it immediately,” she said.

Hoffman said that the tenets of Chick-fil-A’s customer service philosophy, what he calls the “core four,” are applicable to any business that deals with people. These include eye contact to show attentiveness, a smile to promote friendliness, an enthusiastic tone to show excitement and staying connected.

A servant mindset

As Broyles walks the halls of the assisted living facility, she points out a few of the places the residents spend their time – the movie viewing room, the exercise room, a meeting room where a Bible study is taking place. Photos and artwork adorn residents’ doors, not unlike a college residence hall.

This is their home, she said, and they have made it into a community. She emphasizes this to the staff in conversations about customer service.

“I just want them to realize that when they clock in, they’re clocking in and working in our residents’ homes – the residents aren’t living in our work,” she said.

In addition to serving residents, assisted living facility staff serve residents’ families, Hoffman said.

“Families are placing their relatives into the hands of this facility, and they’re very concerned that their relative is having all of their needs met in a kind and meaningful way,” he said.

Residents and family members may forget the cost of the care, but they will not forget how they were treated, he said.

Fostering service among employees

In addition to talking about customer interaction, Hoffman shared some lessons with leadership on fostering service among employees.

It starts with hiring, he said. You can teach someone how to bread chicken, but you can’t teach someone courtesy.

“We try to hire people who have at least a kernel of service aptitude that we can water and weed and feed and watch blossom,” he said.

Not making eye contact in a job interview is a giant red flag in the customer service business, Hoffman said.

“If [a job candidate] won’t make eye contact with [the interviewer], how can I expect them to make eye contact with our guests?”

Being clear about expectations is also important.

“If an employee is walking into the restaurant to begin their shift and they see a paper cup blowing around in the Chick-fil-A parking lot, they’re expected to pick that up because that’s a way to serve our guests. You can’t say that you’re not on the clock yet. You’re expected to go above and beyond,” he said.

Great customer service enables Coventry Meadows to out-perform other facilities, Hoffman said. These days, all assisted living facilities have a movie theater and a fitness area. Providing great customer service to residents and their families is an opportunity to outshine the competition, he said, and it doesn’t cost a thing.

“Courtesy is cheap. It doesn’t cost any more to be courteous,” he said.

Parkview Health vies for top nursing designation

Magnet status would be an important tool for attracting and retaining nursing talent

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Parkview Health officials are hoping to join the ranks of the 6 percent of American hospitals that have achieved what many health-care professionals consider the gold standard in nursing excellence and a powerful tool for attracting and retaining nursing talent.

Developed by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the Magnet Recognition Program recognizes health care organizations for quality patient care, nursing excellence and innovations in professional nursing practice.

The designation originated from a nursing shortage in the 1980s. The American Academy of Nursing Task Force on Nursing Practice in Hospitals conducted a study to identify work environments that attract and retain well-qualified nurses who promote quality care.

The study found that 41 of 163 institutions possessed qualities that enabled greater capacity to attract and retain nurses, and were therefore described as “magnet” hospitals. The commonalities of these institutions were deemed as “forces of magnetism.”

Later, the American Nurses Association board of directors approved a proposal for the Magnet Hospital Recognition Program for Excellence in Nursing Services, building upon the study.

To earn Magnet status, a hospital undergoes an extensive application process that can take more than a year to complete. The hospital must be re-designated after four years to ensure compliance.



Crossley

Right now, Goshen Hospital is the only hospital in northeast Indiana to hold magnet status. The hospital has held its status continuously since 2004, and is in the process of gaining its third re-designation.

“It is the most prestigious designation that

any health care organization can receive,” said Julie Crossley, chief nursing officer for Goshen Health.

While Magnet status is specific to nursing, the credentialing organization looks at the overall organization excellence across the entire care team, she said. This includes consideration of quality outcomes, nursing practice environment, high patient satisfaction and high physician satisfaction in working with nurses.

Fostering a culture that promotes nurse engagement and strives to give nurses a voice in decision-making is also an important quality of Magnet hospitals.

Magnet hospitals have outstanding nurse-to-patient ratios, Crossley said. That’s a quality that plays a major role in attracting and retaining nursing talent.

“From a nurse’s perspective, when you’re looking for a place of employment, that’s important,” she said. “You want to work in an organization in which you have the nurse-to-patient ratio that allows you to make a difference and deliver the care that you want for your patient.”

Last year, Parkview Health announced that it was creating more than 50 registered

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Julie Crossley
Goshen Health

nursing positions to improve its hospital’s nurse-to-patient ratio. That ratio is now nearing one nurse to every four patients, said Eric Clabaugh, Parkview Health spokesman.

Crossley said that Goshen Hospital’s Magnet status helps the organization attract new talent and that the environment fostered in compliance with Magnet standards has led to lower turnover rates than the national standard.

“I love to hear stories of what brought our talent to Goshen Hospital,” she said. “Time and again, I hear that they recognize Goshen Health’s Magnet status and that was part of their decision-making.”

To apply for Magnet status, hospitals have to pay a fee to the American Nurses Credentialing Center based on the number of beds they have. The fee is small compared to the time hospitals invest to reach Magnet status, Crossley said.

To her, the designation is more than a gold star – it’s a symbol of a hospital’s commitment to excellence.

“It’s a journey, and it’s a commitment that an organization makes,” she said. “It’s not something that you can do overnight.”

Parkview Health applied for Magnet

status for each of its hospitals, Clabaugh said. That includes Parkview Regional Medical Center, Parkview Hospital Randallia, Parkview Behavioral Health, Parkview Noble Hospital, Parkview LaGrange Hospital, Parkview Whitely Hospital, Parkview Wabash Hospital and Parkview Huntington Hospital.

This is the first time Parkview Health has applied for the designation. The “long and thoughtful application process” began about nine months ago, Clabaugh said, but Parkview Health has spent the last decade bringing its model of care up to a level that is reflective of that demanded by the Magnet Recognition Program.

“This is more than a capital or operational investment – it’s an investment of time that has been led by our chief nursing executive Judy Boerger for almost 10 years now,” he said.

In April, officials from the American Nurses Credentialing Center spent a week visiting Parkview Health hospitals and are currently in the process of making their final evaluations, Clabaugh said. The hospitals should find out if they earned Magnet Recognition in June or July.